

CLASS STRUGGLE

COMMUN-
ISTS IN
TRADE
UNIONS

B.TRENCH, THE HIGH COURT AND THE SWM
MILITANT'S CHAUVINISM

commentary

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20p
no.1 june



IRISH
WORKERS
GROUP

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BNM Adam

FROM THE HUNGER STRIKE TO THE GENERAL ELECTION

PORTLAOISE

G.P.O. - APRIL 16

The demo at Portlaoise jail had three aims -- to show solidarity with the hunger strikers, to protest at Garda brutality and to oppose the special restrictions in the prison. The stress on the vague idea of solidarity rather on the demand for their release and the release of all political prisoners was to be repeated in the weeks ahead.

The 5000-strong demonstration at Dublin's General Post Office on April 16 in solidarity with Provisional Republican hunger strikers raises questions the left must answer; that is, those of the left who were there only to be shown up at their weakest both in the raggedness of their presence and politically in the opportunist muddle that passes for a programme in leaflets.

The violent prevention of the demonstration's attempt to assemble at the prison by masses of riot-equipped Gardai posed in the sharpest way the question of how to enforce and defend the right to demonstrate. The Provos' politics were no match for the problems posed. They failed to equip squads in the front and flanks with batons and clubs though they knew there would be a push from the more militant and steeled youth and Northern participants to try to smash through the cordons and assert the right to assemble at the agreed place. Given the inability of the Provo leadership and their conspiratorial politics to give the push some direction it turned into an uncoordinated stoning. And given the 'concession' negotiated between Provo leaders and Gardai, the Provos claimed that the demo was not a defeat but a victory because they were able to assemble elsewhere.

The meeting was hijacked by the Provos through the 'Irish Civil Rights Association' which trails them abjectly. A benumbed crowd was subjected to an interminable queue of republican speakers sermonising about the "sacredness of human life", the "human dignity" of the prisoners and demanding bourgeois "ordinary justice" for them. They also called for token and immediate industrial stoppages, without any preparation, which were to be kept brief so as not to disrupt!

The facts are, however that it was brutally, physically prevented from assembling at the prison and the State forces were able to ascertain that the Provos were incapable of raising the question of defence of demonstrations. Thus Garda batons crushed the right to assemble.

The Hunger Strike protest was defused by the Provos in three moves. They cancelled the demo called for Portlaoise for the 17th by the Belfast Relatives Action Committee and put ICRA at the head of the lot in Dublin on the 16th. They refused to mobilise and concentrate all their forces on a national scale into the demo which they had diverted to Dublin. They made speeches denying any confrontation with the Southern State, pretending that the Government was trumping up the idea of confrontation to excuse their 'not-an-inch' stand on the hunger strikers elementary demands.

The Provo leadership, unable to face the need for defence had no option but to defuse the situation for April 16th. Its own refusal to engage in joint action and United Front work meant that no other politically organised groups had a chance to pose the issue before the masses of protestors, which is precisely why they refuse to participate in any significant joint action.

Not even the two self-styled marxists on the platform who swim in the same soup as ICRA had the principle to say what they stood for - or in one case to speak on the demands of the group he was representing - the Galway Civil Liberties Action Committee.

Irish Workers Group members took part in the march carrying slogans for the release of the prisoners

FROM THE HUNGER STRIKE TO

for a trade union inquiry into prisons and torture under rank and file control, for the abolition of the Special Criminal Court and for the building of a united front against repression.

We did not march because of humanitarian concern for the prisoners, much as we admire their heroism. We did not march because of our concern to have the state respect the "sacredness" of human life, and we did not march as a gesture.

We marched in support of anti-imperialist political prisoners, members of an organisation which has never baulked at the use of violence in furthering the struggle. The mealy-mouthed catholic nationalist rhetoric of the Provos on that Saturday was utter hypocrisy and signified political hollowness. How can a revolutionary armed movement plead for humanitarian concern from a State that has never been shy of killing and interning anti-imperialists. This cannot be the basis for a serious campaign against repression.

Ironically it was the professional agents of bourgeois 'humanitarianism', the bishops, who brought the hunger strike to an end by appealing to this same false consciousness.

Of course we will fight alongside any worker or republican moved by humanitarian concern or reformist ideals to stop torture and repression, but we do not ever argue this as the basis for action. The time has passed now when even that soft appeal would win a response. If that is not the case why then were the police and not the demonstrators cheered by a 'nationalist' crowd in Croke Park the day after the GPO meeting?

Not having a class perspective on the anti-imperialist struggle, Southern workers would tolerate even more repression of republicans because the struggle is portrayed to them as depraved murder bearing no relation to their interests and in no way under their control. Republicans and socialists have never built a campaign in the South which clearly expressed the political nature of repression and which

propagandised the necessity of defending anti-imperialists as such from the Southern State. And in the North, not since 1972 has a democratic mass campaign been possible because of the disastrous bombing campaign which has reduced anti-unionists to passive pawns of SDLP and the Peace Movement. Only in the context of a mass movement can military tactics be effective. Both North and South the bankruptcy of the Provisionals' politics has played into the hands of the ruling class.

The petty-bourgeois nature of the Provos goes some way towards explaining why they are not really serious about defending political status of prisoners. The April demonstrations showed this. It is even clearer, however, from their refusal to join broad local campaigns, unless they can control them, in the fight against repression. They have at times opposed agitation around cases of their own members who were tortured, beaten or harrassed, unless they were actually imprisoned in which case they became useful for the Provos' particular brand of propaganda. The moralism of their politics is at its most dangerous when they maintain that winning political status from the state is not ultimately important as long as the prisoner is privately convinced that he or she is a political victim of British imperialism.

Their deep-rooted nationalism compromises their hostility to the Southern State, and so they will not campaign resolutely against it despite recent claims of such a new turn, and despite its use of every possible means to smash them.

As socialists, therefore, we can never trail behind the Provos or their fronts. We will work with them in the anti-imperialist struggle but only in a united front in which we can advocate revolutionary socialist methods and perspectives.

LOYALIST "STRIKE"

Unlike the SWM, we did not for one minute believe that the Loyalist "strike" had to be opposed simply "because its aims and objectives are sectarian". Nor did we look to "the Protestant working class themselves" as "the only way this strike can be broken completely".

This economism led SWM logically to believe that the unions could "protect" back to work marches and finally to conclude that "if the Loyalist thugs can be isolated and defeated by Protestants, prospects can open up towards overcoming sectarianism through militant working class unity". If only there were grounds for such pious hopes! In essence SWM have never taken seriously their own statements about the Northern State as the bedrock of unionism and sectarianism in the working class. If the extreme loyalists could be put down, SWM believe, it would be easier to propagandise for socialism among Protestants. More than a shade of Militant here! Certainly, where it is ever possible the unionist working class must be propagandised with socialist ideas, but not in order to create new obstacles of economism and reformism.

In Derry an IWG bulletin was distributed on the eve of the "strike" stressing the essential issues. The strike highlighted the weakness of the anti-imperialist struggle and the growth of repression North and South which has emboldened the Loyalists to go for more - with some results. The bulletin urged:

"we must be absolutely clear that any resistance to a loyalist "strike" must be on the grounds that it is loyalism, the Northern State and British Imperialism that remain to be smashed. So far the struggle against these has been inadequate - the result of using military action as a strategy rather than as tactics and leading to the loss of mass political involvement on the streets both North and South. In any resistance to loyalism we must begin to rebuild that mass political support within the anti-unionist working class as the foundation

for the ultimate involvement of the Irish working class North and South. Only this perspective can prepare the basis for a successful armed assault upon the Northern State and Imperialism. - "Smash the Loyalist Strike". "Build the United Front of Workers/Socialists/Republicans."

"In the event of anti-unionist workers attempting to march to work we must call upon the Trade Union movement, the Derry Trades Council to give a lead on the march. But we must have no faith in such 'leaders'. Their record of sit-on-the-fence respectability, their refusal to act over past discrimination, internment and Army terror - the 'fruits' of imperialism - is only the other side of the coin to refusing to fight unemployment, low wages, bad housing, emigration - the fruits of capitalism -.

"We must refuse to accept any pleas from Trade Union leaders or anyone else to make any march "non-political" on the excuse that 'it will get more support'. This is a recipe for turning the fights against loyalism and its state - a political fight - into a simple economic struggle. It is not on! Furthermore, any attempt to accept 'protection' from the B.A. against Loyalist thugs must be completely rejected. Rather than do so we should refuse to march. Our enemy is above all those who have spawned loyalism and its states, North and South. Therefore we demand

"British Troops Out" as a focus of resistance to loyalism. We must put ourselves firmly on the side of those directly fighting British Imperialism and immediately suffering from its repression - republicans. We must call for the retention of "Political Status for Republicans" as a clear sign that whatever criticisms and differences exist on politics, strategy and tactics we will not permit Imperialism to turn republican fighters into criminals...."

GENERAL ELECTIONS

NO JOY FOR THE WORKING CLASS

Whatever pleasure we may feel at the massive defeat suffered by the Coalition government of Cosgrave, O'Brien and Cooney, the return of the Southern State's other major capitalist pro-imperialist party is no victory for those who have borne the full brunt of the Coalition's vicious anti-working class policies.

On the day after the elections shares in the Dublin Stock Exchange in the property and construction business rose by £8million. Clearly someone expects to benefit, but it won't be workers. For, Fianna Fail are just as determined to continue with policies which will protect and further the interests of native capitalism and are just as equally determined to stamp out anyone who threatens in any way the existing social, economic or political order. There will be no end to the pro-imperialist, collaborationary role of a party which was the first to begin systematically arresting republicans and attacking democratic rights of protest.

PROTEST VOTE

It is obvious that large sections of Irish workers turned against the coalition because they had had enough of its blatant cynical disregard for the effects of policies which saw unemployment and inflation increase, women's rights to contraception and equal pay ignored totally and living standards drop sharply.

A Labour Party that presides over policies like these, and at the same time endorses the build up of the state's repressive apparatus, the violation of democratic rights, the torture of political prisoners, doesn't deserve support for four minutes, never mind four years.

For thousands, their vote for Fianna Fail registered a protest against the coalition. It in no way can be seen as simple-minded faith in Lynch's party and policies.

They voted for him because, after four years of weathering the most systematic attacks on them since the fifties no coherent resistance or alternative emerged from those organisations claiming to represent the true interests of working class people and the oppressed generally - the trade unions, the left in the Labour Party, the republican movement or the revolutionary left.

Either these organisations tamely contented themselves with abstract calls for the coalition or the Labour Party on its own to nationalise more resources, or simply relied upon more sectional militancy in wage struggles as the way forward for a divided and demoralised class. What these perspectives clearly lack is the recognition that a weakened and divided class is in need of political answers for the immediate struggles on wages, jobs and prices, women's rights, repression, which not only concretely lay the basis for uniting the strong and the weak in the working class, urban and rural workers, employed and unemployed, male and female, young and old, but also in doing so raise in struggle the clear need to go beyond the reformist and nationalist illusions in the capitalist economy and its state.

The I.W.G. believe that among large sections of workers in the South there exists a clear perception of the need for socialist and class unity. But the question must be what kind of unity - on what programme and strategy the left can regroup. For us it must involve hammering out a set of demands which in uniting different sections of our class will not only provide defence now against capitalist attacks upon us, but will at the same time offer the perspective of a class-wide offensive upon capitalist rule as a whole. Without such a perspective the Irish working class will go on voting for its class enemy and revolutionaries will remain irrelevant.

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begin to build the anti-union local support within the working class as the foundation

The Origins of the Irish Workers Group

** IWG **

The Irish Workers Group originated as a left opposition within the Socialist Workers Movement in 1975. The immediate issues around which the left opposition crystallised were:

- (i) The North
- (ii) Women

On both these questions the S.W.M. held positions which effectively reduced (a) the national question to a subordinate role in the programme and strategy for the Irish Working Class socialist revolution; (b) the emancipation of women from both exploitation and oppression to a side issue better left to pressure groups and liberals.

The left opposition group differed fundamentally on these issues. With regard to the North we argued for the centrality of the national question and for systematic propaganda, agitation and intervention, in particular the building of the United Fronts within the anti-unionist population. In this context we saw and still see the importance of raising particular demands on the S.D.L.P. as a means of drawing larger sections of anti-unionist workers into the struggle and breaking the hold of the S.D.L.P.

With regard to the women question, the left opposition not only won the membership of the S.W.M. to see the strategic necessity of the demands for contraception and abortion on demand but fought for them to be taken up within the Irish working class - as an aspect of this we called for the building of a mass working class women's movement as a strategic imperative for the group and for the class.

The S.W.M. leadership resisted tooth and nail our attempts. In reply to the numerous documents written by the left for internal discussion the S.W.M. leadership never once answered in writing and they resorted to a campaign of slander and lies, appealing in the process to the crude workerism of many of the politically more backward members of the S.W.M.

The left group continued to analyse the continuing failure of the S.W.M. to grow in conditions most suitable to testing the revolutionary programme. We concluded that the S.W.M.'s complete misconception of how to build a revolutionary movement stemmed from their wholly inadequate conception of revolutionary Marxism, its principles and traditions.

In particular their inability to see the crucial need for the group to begin the process of developing the basis for a fully worked out, concrete programme, applying the method developed first by Marx and Engels and culminating finally in the works and experience of Lenin and Trotsky in the 3rd and 4th International. Without a programmatic basis, rooted as a principle in an analysis of the world economy and locating the particular features of Ireland under capitalism and imperialism as one part of that international world market, no lasting concrete strategy for workers power can ever emerge. In the last seven years no 'marxist' group in Ireland has ever been able to withstand the strong currents of republicanism, reformism and opportunism which sweep around the Irish working class. All remain insignificant commentators representing ideologically differing degrees of centrism either capitulating, like the S.W.M. to economism and to workerism or like the P.D., M.S.R., I.R.S.P., I.S.P., R.R.P. to republicanism.

The Irish Workers Group produced last November the first draft of our Manifesto. In this we tried to re-establish some of the fundamentals - the A.B.C. of Revolutionary Marxism - including internationalism, democratic centralism, reformism, the party, etc. Since that document's limited circulation we have further developed its conception of the nature of the Transitional

Programme and its key role and method of application in the present epoch for a working class answer to the crisis of capitalism and Imperialism. Although still a small group with branches in Derry, Galway and Dublin and individuals elsewhere, we have begun to intervene practically in the struggles of the class, at the same time maintaining a high priority of theoretical and educational work for all members and contacts. The group believes in serious and principled polemical debate with the left in Ireland and Internationally as part of the process necessary for the creation of a principled programmatic regroupment here and elsewhere of the best elements of a new International.

The building of a new party in Ireland must be seen as a national component of that International. Only such a perspective can guarantee the revolutionary basis for the end of the blood-soaked rule of capitalism for ever. To it we pledge ourselves.

-o-

I W G

The Manifesto of the Irish Workers Group will be published at the end of August.

For the present, CLASS STRUGGLE will be published quarterly or every two months at most. Local bulletins will supplement it in each area.

Correspondence with IWG is best conducted via a member directly but letters may be sent to Matt Docherty, c/o 90 Upper Dorset Street, Dublin 1.

THE FAR LEFT AND THE MURRAYS

- THE LIMITS OF OPPORTUNISM 1.

The issue on which repression by the Southern State has focussed most sharply in the recent past has been the decision to hang the Murrays by the Special Criminal Court. Coming after a full spate of the most repressive measures, and culminating in the declaration of a state of emergency, the issue provided the 'revolutionary' left in Ireland with another searching test of programme and strategy. Without exception, each grouping from the motley assortment of centrists and left republicans displayed the most shameful capitulation to reformism and liberalism in their gaderene rush to get an audience.

The possibility which the issue raised of creating a small but principled nucleus of workers, socialists and republicans against repression, firmly grounded in a theory and practice politically independent from all liberal, reformist and republican solutions was squandered. As the whole question of constructing anew the basis of a genuine international revolutionary socialist programme is raised by this issue, this article will examine in detail the positions taken up by the left.

The 'far left' groups - PD, MSR, SWM, RRP and IRSP intervened on the Murray issue on the 'unity' programme of the Murray Defence Committee (MDC). This included taking officer positions on the committee and therefore implied full support for the main demands of the MDC.

The four central demands of the MDC were:

1. Reprieve the Murrays.
2. End Capital Punishment.
3. Trial by Jury.
4. For an independent Enquiry.

We shall examine these one by one.

THE REPRIEVE DEMAND

The Murrays were arrested, tried and convicted under the Special

Criminal Court, a court set up by the Southern capitalist class and their state as part of its role in helping to destroy the armed resistance of the Provos and the threat posed by them and by the continued resistance of the Northern minority to loyalism and British imperialism - a threat to the stability of the Southern state.

The Murrays' action cannot be divorced from their context. Though we do not as revolutionary marxists agree with their brand of politics or their method (in essence a form of individual terrorism), we fully recognise them as political prisoners of the southern capitalist class, allies of British imperialism.

Under no circumstances can revolutionary socialists recognise the right of that class and its state under whatever form to judge the Murrays. Only the Irish working class can eventually judge them. Therefore the only correct demand in respect of their imprisonment and sentence should have been Free the Murrays.

The demand of the MDC essentially recognised the right of the Irish capitalist class to arrest, try and convict them, even though some of those supporting the demand did not, privately, recognise this right. The position was one of quibbling about the 'decency' or 'fairness' or 'justice' of hanging them. Thus the authority and legitimacy of a bourgeois court and the bourgeois state is strengthened by a campaign to show how it should operate properly or humanely.

The Irish Workers' Group believes this was treachery to the fundamental principles of revolutionary marxism which must be based on a strategy which at all times is absolutely politically independent from any illusions in the bourgeois state machinery - courts, law, police or parliament etc.

The naked liberalism and reformism of the central demand of the MDC leads to the mistakes of the next one.

RE-TRIAL BY JURY

Not just a jury trial, but even more detailed - "that fresh scientific evidence not hitherto offered in Irish courts be admitted"!

Here it is explicitly presented that a bourgeois court with a jury represents a superior form of 'justice' for those fighting British imperialism and Irish capitalism. Here our lefts trail behind every liberal bourgeois in press, pulpit and parliament peddling such muck to a working class which has not got, will not and can never under capitalism expect justice.

Jury trials are class justice, no more acceptable to us as a tribunal of judgement for anti-imperialist fighters than the Special Criminal Court. Furthermore, the logic of this demand leads to the situation where a jury decision, even one to free the Murrays, would have the effect of strengthening ruling class ideas about the 'neutrality' of bourgeois justice. What do we demand if a jury trial, even with the admission of new evidence, finds them guilty? Let the centrists of the MDC answer that!

Having effectively defended the institutions they ever so loudly proclaim they want to destroy, the MDC's next demand - Abolish Capital Punishment - is revealed as a moralistic and humanitarian gesture of liberals more concerned with making Irish society more "civilised", less barbaric, "as befits a member of the European community".

Instead of seeing the existence of capital punishment as one of the most horrific weapons the Irish ruling class has used and will use again against those who threaten in any way their interests; instead of explaining how such complicity strengthens the chains that ideologically bind workers to those who exploit them; instead of these class arguments the MDC were forced to ignore the whole context of state

repression in which the Murray case was only the latest and most urgent example, namely the anti-imperialist struggle.

The failure to include in the MDC platform the abolition of the Special Criminal Court proves this point to the hilt. The Murrays were tried by it, tortured under it, and so were hundreds of others before and since. Yet the MDC, for fear of losing the involvement of their 'liberal' supporters (whoever they may be) spinelessly decided not to campaign on this because of its clear identification with the repression of republicans and the struggle in the North. Thus while opposing the death penalty, these "socialists" preferred to reform rather than oppose the institution which was the immediate agent of that penalty. Yet these people claim in other places, and on other platforms to be fighting repression! Some fight.

FOR AN INDEPENDENT INQUIRY...

This is the perfect capstone for this muddle of bleating liberals. An "independent" enquiry, as they all know, is utterly impossible in a society of class division. Having of course put all your eggs into one basket of bourgeois justice - reprieve and retrial - what better way to prove that capitalist institutions are indeed 'neutral' than by having an independent ie non-class enquiry?

THE CAMPAIGN

'Armed' with its rosary of liberal demands, the MDC further capitulated by refusing to orientate its whole effort to the working class movement - factories, trade union branches, Labour Party branches, tenants associations (whose national body carried a resolution against capital punishment) - as well as to students. This was not an accident but flows consistently from the decision to include the above basically liberal (instead of working-class) demands. They were meant to get an audience and support on the lowest political level possible. In other words they decided to trim their sails to what

they knew would be a fierce wind of working-class hostility, well demonstrated by the withdrawal of access to a trade-union meeting place.

At the G.P.O. rally, October 30th, Eamonn Mc Cann summed up this opportunism so well when he stated that as it was impossible to get the support of the labour movement, the 'fight' would have to rest with those assembled there. For the centrists of the MDC the all-important thing was to get an audience even if this meant dropping all the fundamentals of marxism, justified by the excuse that the important thing was to "save the Murrays". Why not? After all, it is possible to make speeches about the need for socialism and socialist politics on other occasions and platforms!

What is clearly absent in the far left is any method by which the issue of the Murrays could be connected by a series of demands to the very centre of the general question of state repression. The need for a set of such demands was crucial for the beginning of a fight explicitly directed to the working class. The IWG believes the demands should have been from the beginning:

1. Free the Murrays.
2. Abolish the Special Criminal Court.
3. Abolish Capital Punishment.
4. For a Trade Union and Labour Movement Enquiry under rank and file inspection and control.

ABOLISHING CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

These demands clearly illustrate why we as socialists are opposed to the hanging of the Murrays - because the hangman is the capitalist State which is using every anti-democratic measure, including torture, to get convictions against anyone it chooses to pick up; that it is in the interests of the working class that these class measures be resisted. Therefore the working class must investigate publicly the whole set of circumstances arising out of the arrest, detention and convictions of the Murrays.

Our centrists are right when they

point out that the working class would not respond with roses to our demands. But what does that prove? Surely that the campaign against repression in the South, that the whole question of internment and the British Army in the North should have been at the forefront of revolutionary activity in the working class years ago.

Instead the revolutionary left, like the cowardly and centrist SWM preferred to believe that the question of repression "wasn't posed sharply enough in the South" in 1974; that only when one had built up working class support on wages and related questions could one expect any support for wider issues. This despicable economism has effectively wrecked the SWM. But nothing has been learned! This is clear from the MDC and subsequent developments.

The absence of a clear campaign has left the Irish working class defenceless against the poison of propaganda from the sewers of the bourgeois media. And yet, if a small but determined campaign had begun, whatever the setbacks and difficulties, events have since shown so clearly how it could have been the basis for a widening campaign involving workers' groups.

LOST CHANCES

Have not workers struck over repression and emergency legislation? Have not the decisions by the courts to free men tortured by the Gardai provided excellent material for such a campaign in the working class movement. Would not the revelations by the Irish Times - it was left to this hypocritical bourgeois paper to 'champion' democracy - would they not have provided even more damning evidence had the left built the core of a campaign around a clear line long ago.

All of these opportunities were wasted by the treacherous policies of the left in Ireland. Now they bleat about working class hostility and apathy. On the contrary, we say, it is your hostility to revolutionary politics, your inability to learn the lessons of your centrism that is

the obstacle to building a campaign.

For six years the revolutionary left in Ireland, in one form or another, have stood on the sideline of the struggles being fought. No marxist organisation has counted as an alternative to any of the petty bourgeois and reformist solutions being offered North or South. In the face of the demoralisation and apathy within a working class utterly incapable on its own of generating class-wide solutions, the far left have shown only the bankruptcy of their programmes and strategies. The splits and fracturing on the left are the clearest sign that new solutions, new strategies and new ideas are necessary.

In some respects the fragments represented by the PD, MSR, SWM, ISP, IRSP and RRP recognise this, but in a wholly inadequate way. The Murray Committee proves this conclusively. Here, left unity on a liberal platform revealed just how far the degeneration has gone. But this opportunist capitulation in the name of broad unity is only one side of the left's centrism.

SECTARIANISM

The other side is, of course, sectarianism. During the Labour Party conference in Limerick the MDC organised a picket at the hall. Instead of seeing that conference as a focus for a mass rally relating from outside to the sections of the labour movement inside who were concerned about the Murrays, the picket was a pathetic demonstration of the MDC's weakness.

Firstly, the left who claimed so loudly that it was so important to "save the Murrays" didn't turn out their organisations as a priority. Instead one or two members from the Limerick area and Dublin fitfully supported the picket. What is worse, instead of fully supporting the demonstration, weak as it was, the MSR, SWM, PD, IRSP and Provos saw fit to stand aside and sell their papers even during the short period of the picket and only to join it for a token presence.

The IWG while opposed to the demand for a reprieve, joined the picket with our demands and remained on it.

A QUICK CHANGE OF HATS

The sectarianism of the left was further revealed at a meeting of the local Anti-Repression Committee in Limerick the previous night. There the IWG asked three questions of the SWM and PD speakers.

1. Why no mention of the Murrays by them at the meeting?
2. Why the separation of the MDC from the question of repression?
3. How could they say that the demands of the Murray Committee didn't effectively support bourgeois legality and institutions?

Our questions were attacked as sectarian disruption! It seemed that Trench (SWM) and Farrell (PD) were wearing their anti-repression hats that night - not their MDC ones.

To the third question SWM revealed just how cynical they really were about the Murray Committee, revolutionary principle and the class struggle. Trench admitted that 'Free the Murrays' was the correct demand and that they disagreed with the notion of an "independent" enquiry. So! One of the member groups of the MDC feels that it is permissible to join a committee whose demands it disagrees with (except 'abolish capital punishment' - very revolutionary!), and then claim that it is interested in united action.

This shameless cynicism should have had the SWM immediately removed from any organisation worth talking about. Not so the MDC. Naturally, then, the SWM gave only token space to the campaign in its paper. (In fact, SWM, in issue 38 of the WORKER, urged readers to collect signatures "in support of the aims of the Murray Defence Committee"!.) Furthermore, they never argued in their paper why the MDC's demands were inadequate. So much for their seriousness about the 'real world'.

B. TRENCH, HIGH COURT & SWM

On Thursday Feb. 17, 1977 the High Court in Dublin imposed a fine of £150 plus costs on the fortnightly radical journal 'Hibernia' for what the President of the Court described as 'contempt' of court. The contempt in this case constituted the printing in Hibernia of two letters which implied that the Special Criminal Court 'trial' of the Murrays was a sham.

The acting editor of Hibernia at that time was Brian Trench, leading member of the Socialist Workers' Movement. His organisation proclaims to be a revolutionary marxist group and to be committed to building a party whose aim is the smashing of the institutions of the Irish Bourgeois state, among which they correctly include the courts and judiciary.

Furthermore, Trench's group has consistently been involved in the propaganda and activities on the Murrays. It has also called for the abolition of the Special Criminal Court, an institution responsible for jailing hundreds on the say-so of a police chief.

Therefore, it would seem a matter of elementary principle that Trench would seize the opportunity of his appearance before the High Court to argue his political opposition to the S.C.C., as well as the whole judicial, state and economic system in which it flourishes, and call for trade union opposition in support of the Murrays and republicans. After all, what SWM demand of others to do should be automatic for them as leaders.

Alas, Trench decided to forget his politics and his principles. Not only that, but he cravenly and in a cowardly way mimicked the judges and their flunkies by repeating the whole load of ideological poison about the neutrality of the courts of the ruling class. Here is part of his affidavit;

"He did not consider they (the letters) could be construed as bringing the court into contempt nor as being prejudicial to the administration of justice. If he had realised that they were capable of such interpretations he would not have published them. If the court should hold that the publication of the letters did scandalise the court and interfere with the

course of justice, he wished to offer a full apology and to express his deep regret." (Our emphases.)

Such is the principled opposition of a 'marxist' before a bourgeois court suppressing free speech in the press on an issue on which hundreds of anti-imperialists have been jailed and tortured. We believe Trench's actions are a disgusting and flagrant betrayal of not only his own small group but of marxists in general.

In Ireland where the working class North and South so desperately need a revolutionary socialist leadership armed with a programme tried and tested in the furnace of class struggle, republicans alone have displayed heroism and self-sacrifice in pursuit of their goals.

WHAT DOES SWM SAY?

As we have argued both within and outside the SWM, Trench and the SWM represent a centrist sect, veering with the wind of every struggle, but leading none. It is clear from this latest and most cowardly act of opportunism that the SWM is moving significantly rightwards as the problems facing the class mount.

We call upon the SWM members to answer the following questions.

1. Was the issue of Trench's 'appearance' before the court debated before he submitted his affidavit?
2. Do the SWM members believe that revolutionary socialists can individually pick and choose when they will oppose the system's institutions? If so, what is the point of calling oneself a revolutionary socialist and belonging to a group?
3. How does SWM explain Trench's actions to its supporters whom it regularly calls upon to support those who do resist the courts.

So far, SWM has printed nothing in its paper concerning this issue, a widely publicised issue which did not escape the main RTE news bulletins. Why the silence?

THE FIGHT FOR POLITICAL STATUS

- THE LIMITS OF OPPORTUNISM 2.

Over a year ago, after several months' warning, the British ended special category status for republicans arrested and charged after April 1st 1976. This move was correctly seen by socialists as a major political step to ideologically further erode the remaining links between the republican movement and the anti-unionist population, thus weakening the ability of the IRA to continue its campaign.

The issue thus raised in the sharpest possible way the very basis, meaning and relevance of the whole conflict in the last seven years. By their readiness to attack such a cardinal principle, the authorities demonstrated a determination and a confidence born of the knowledge that considerable apathy and demoralisation (- among other things the Assembly had collapsed -) had sapped the will of thousands of anti-unionists to continue a struggle which promised no solution on the basis on which it was being waged by the Provos.

For socialists and republicans, therefore, the issue represented the most critical development in the fight so far. If the British could successfully 'criminalise' their 'enemy' in what everyone knew to be a war between one section of the Irish people and British Imperialism and loyalism then it would be the clearest sign that, whatever pockets of resistance remained the war had moved politically in favour of imperialism and its allies North and South. For socialists, clearly, the question of fighting this development posed the need for the formulation of a clear and correct strategy which if agreed upon had to be fought for and implemented whatever the opposition.

THE UNITED FRONT

The slogan for an anti-imperialist united front has appeared frequently in the programmes of the revolutionary left in the last few years. The IWG believes that the slogan is the most crucial part of revolutionary

practice in the present situation. However, we believe that the failure of the left to situate the slogan in the context of an overall revolutionary perspective has led to the slogan becoming nothing more than an organisational alternative to republicanism. That perspective must be one of:

- a. drawing the anti-unionist working class as a class to the forefront of the struggle in the North;
- b. the development of an anti-unionist armed front of workers, socialists and republicans;
- c. mobilisation for a general strike;
- d. the emergence of soviets;
- e. the demand for a Workers' Government.

The united front is a tactic adopted by revolutionary marxists when i. objectively the most pressing needs of the masses can only be defended by united mass action, and ii. subjectively the masses remain under the leadership, programmes, organisation and methods of forces which are not revolutionary socialist and are obstacles to both the defence of immediate interests and to the long-term needs and development of the struggle for a workers state.

Therefore, the united front is a method by which both aims - uniting the masses on the most important issues facing them, and exposing the false solutions of non-marxists - can be achieved under the leadership of revolutionary marxists and their programmes. While in the short term the united front focusses on the most immediate needs, it is at the same time the basis for deepening and widening the struggle into an offensive. Thus all local, partial immediate issues must be located within a perspective which ultimately sees the emergence of an armed front headed by the anti-unionist working class as the only means of defending the gains of the struggle. In such a situation, one basically of dual power, the method of the U.F. remains

the same - mobilising the broad mass of the Irish people on the most militant and revolutionary demands. Thus the demand for the general strike and the leading role of soviets (workers councils) and for a workers government cannot in principle be separated from a perspective of building a mass united front against imperialism - nor can the creation of the revolutionary party and its programme.

When the slogan for the U.F. is seen from this political perspective it is easily understood why the right of each organisation to argue its own political line is a principle of united front activity. Without this right there can be no criticism, debate or argument before and within the masses on past, present and future activity. When the masses do not test the programmes of the participating organisations against their experiences the front remains in effect the vehicle for the non-marxist forces to carry out joint activity on their terms.

Thus in the present situation where thousands are demoralised, to a large extent because of the politics and military tactics of the Provisionals, such fronts are a cover for their strategy and in no way contribute to the breaking down of the apathy and demoralisation. For left groups to participate in such fronts amounts to disgraceful opportunism.

Furthermore, without the freedom to criticise and debate, the only means whereby the revolutionary left can relate to the most politically conscious men and women is lost. In such circumstances no class-conscious vanguard from within the class can be located and developed as the natural leaders of their class. Without the means to identify this stratum in the class marxist groups remain passive commentators in theory and active opportunists in practice. If as organisations they gain at all it can only be on lines which capitulate to republicanism. Ultimately, as the IRSP split showed, this has no future.

POLITICAL STATUS - THE RECORD OF THE LEFT

When the British Government announced their intention to end political status the revolutionary left were

offered a clear opening to put into practice their calls for the united front. Yet, between the announcement by the British and the first prisoner sentenced, a period of almost seven months, the left did nothing. Why? Simply because the Provisionals preferred to wait, as usual, for the prisoners themselves to give a lead, hoping, no doubt, that mass spontaneous activity by anti-unionists such as happened over internment would enable them to avoid any kind of unity with other political groups, particularly marxist.

If the left had quickly agreed on a simple programme initially around the issue of status, but in principle spelling out the united front structure and the reason for it, inviting all and anyone to join, a small but determined campaign of meetings, leaflets and marches could have focussed the attention of sections of anti-unionists towards the left and their independent strategy.

By preferring to wait for the Provos the left inevitably found themselves wrapped up in one of the innumerable support organisations demanded by the politics of the Provisionals - in this case the Relatives Action Committees. The attempt by the left to turn this into a united front was always doomed. After the 1976 November demo which did see the revolutionary left on the platform in relative strength, the central committee of the R.A.C.s, obviously under pressure from the Provisionals who did not order their branches to support the march, had a number of resolutions passed which effectively killed the last chance of broadening the R.A.C.s politics and structure. Of those present from the left only an IWG comrade opposed these resolutions.

CONDITIONS

What was necessary, then, was for the left to withdraw from the R.A.C.s unless a genuine U.F. structure was set up, stating clearly the reasons. that whilst fully determined to support all demos, meetings etc. of the R.A.C. it would be necessary for the left to criticise aspects of the wider struggle which hampered the development of a mass movement; that, furthermore, instances of murder, harrassment and

torture by army and RUC all demonstrated the clear need to bring all protests under one form of political organisation which could link the ghettos not only in Belfast but Derry etc.

After November the R.A.C., instead of building upon its very promising beginning, initiated a series of local stunts involving women relatives of the prisoners by themselves camping out clad, like the prisoners, only in blankets. In themselves such acts were brave attempts to focus publicity on the status campaign. However, without a wider political perspective they served more to undermine the campaign. Why?

1. Such acts are totally isolated by their very nature from possible acts of solidarity involving hundreds of anti-unionists. It is only through street meetings, demos, rallies etc. in which there is debate and argument on the best way forward and the necessary tactics that political consciousness can be developed on the need for a new perspective among anti-unionists.

2. Through the use of women relatives of the prisoners there is a calculated attempt to turn the political question into a moral and humanitarian question, evoking 'sympathy'. Not only does this encourage republican women in seeing their actions as 'non-political' support, as extractors of sympathy, it also reduces them as the most active to a politically passive role at a time when debate about perspective is crucial. So, in the R.A.C. the women remain under the thumb of the Provisionals. This tendency is further strengthened by the use of relatives who understandably fear for the lives of their suffering loved ones and are less psychologically prepared to tolerate what they see as 'nit-picking' politics and polemics about unity proposals.

The R.A.C.s since organised a large demonstration on March 6th. It is obvious that the Provisionals feel confident that any threat from the marxist left has been warded off:- the platforms remain consistently republican and rhetorical, even Nationalist, the left having accepted

their role as cheerleaders for the Provisionals, still trying to win 'credibility'.

A.I.F. COMMITTEE

Ultimately, realising what rubbish this was, a joint action committee to work for an Anti-Imperialist Front was formed in Belfast composed of the small left groups. The committee did not define its attitude to the R.A.C. which showed that it could mobilise thousands behind a Provo platform. To remain within the R.A.C. was to render the AIF committee a useless and empty exercise in toy bolshevism. To leave the R.A.C. raised the charge of sectarianism and the question of why so long in it, to which the left can say nothing. Such is the price of opportunism. The committee was stillborn.

T H E I R I S H F R O N T

The emergence of the I.F. in Derry summarises in a nutshell all of the above criticisms of the Irish left. It was originated by the right-wing Nationalist Party, long since left behind by the events of the last six years in order to steal a propaganda march on the SDLP in the wake of the 'political vacuum' of direct rule and the approaching local elections.

(In fact Mc Ateer's championing of the I.F. was publicly qualified by opposition to violence. During the election campaign he claimed to be unifying the resistance to repression by joining the I.F., and for his troubles he captured a seat in Derry for his son and the Nationalist Party.)

The Front was set up by the Nationalists, the Provisional Sinn Fein, the reconstituted rump of Derry IRSP and a number of pressure groups all more or less republican.

At no time has the Front attempted to go beyond the crippling limits of a Popular Front. While actually taking up correct demands it has resolutely prevented any socialist method of politics from being put forward. For this reason the IWG would not join it. In effect, the

Front is a total capitulation to the worst form of Irish nationalism as can be seen from the rubbish printed in their bulletins. The Front's charter speaks of the need to unite "for the good of the nation". It talks of "our national saint" (on a St. Patrick's Day leaflet), "our Celtic traditions". It is not surprising that the Front sent a letter to the representative of Irish capitalism in Strasbourg, Costello, congratulating the Irish government on its case against Britain. Even the Irish Times revelations about Garda torture couldn't reveal to the Front how utterly opportunist and unprincipled they were.

It is not surprising, then, that a protest by workers from the Essex factory was persuaded to appeal to Bishop Daly to 'intervene' to help the prisoners in Castlereagh Barracks.

No socialist need raise hands in horror at this - all of it bears the standard mark of the Provisionals and Nationalists trying to appear as parliamentary and respectable as possible in politics. What is horrifying, however, is that all of these measures were in fact not only defended by the "trotskyists" of the IRSP but actively encouraged by them in the delusion that the 'credibility' won will swell the ranks of their politically bankrupt organisation. Hence the fierce resistance to the suggestion by IWG that it should appeal to workers to join it as workers and trade unionists in order to give the Front the perspective of organising strikes. It was the IRSP 'marxists' who attacked this perspective for fear of frightening off Mc Ateer or the Provos.

The Front has organised one very large demo (St. Patrick's Day) through largely appealing to the most backward green nationalism. The IRSP socialists, while capitulating absolutely to this in practice,

are permitted to console themselves with phantasies about 32-county constituent assemblies working out "what kind of state forces Ireland should have" (sic) and about workers militias (sic) as transitional to a socialist police force (sic). On the political basis on which it is constructed the Irish Front, if it survives, can only mean the re-establishment of republicanism at a level ideologically more primitive than ever. The consequence of this for revolutionary socialism and the destiny of the Irish working class will be disastrous.

MARKISM ON CREDIT !

With the capitulations of the Provos on political status both North and South and the dwindling possibility of any mass campaign, revolutionary socialists can have no room for comfort. Divided, small and weak, the left are very much on the sidelines, invited to join 'on conditions'. So far the left has demonstrated that it is always prepared to accept whatever conditions are imposed, persuading themselves that this is the way to buy 'credibility'. In essence this is marxism on credit. "Some day, one day" the argument goes, "will be more suitable for applying our principles but not now".

This is the hallmark of opportunism and it accounts for the irrelevance of the left in the last six years. More fundamentally, it raises the whole question of programme and strategy, the inability of the revolutionary marxists to put forward a genuine international working class programme which is truly independent of all petty bourgeois republicanism and its solutions.

The need to begin to seriously work out this programme, while in no way withdrawing into pure 'theory' is critical. The left must face up to the responsibility of genuinely understanding and learning the lessons of its past failures. Regroupment and fusion is a strategic necessity but only as the outcome of serious and frank discussion.

COMMUNISTS IN THE TRADE UNIONS

Workers in Ireland are among the most extensively organised in trade unions in the capitalist world. Yet Irish workers are far more politically backward than say, in Italy, where trade unions organise a much smaller section of the class. The task of leading Irish workers forward to the creation of workers' councils and a Workers' State must in large measure be worked out in the trade union movement, but it would be wrong to assume that revolutionaries can confine themselves to "official" structures.

The trade unions, viewed as a part of the broad labour movement (which includes house-bound working class women), are the crucial arena in which we must fight for revolutionary politics, but the task is immense and demands not only energy but a degree of clarity and principle of which there is little evidence on the far left, not to speak of the hopelessly compromised stalinists

THE DUBLIN SHOP STEWARDS AND RANK AND FILE COMMITTEE

The DSSC was the longest-running attempt to build a rank and file movement in the unions. We make it the focus of this review, but first we should outline its history.

In Dublin in 1973 three hundred shop stewards pledged opposition to the National Wage Agreement proposals for 1974, contributing through their action to the re-negotiation of better terms by Congress. The early DSSC involved not merely members of the League for a Workers Republic (LWR), the Movement for a Socialist Republic (then RMC) and the Socialist Workers Movement, but also many militants from the "Communist" Party of Ireland. Most of those involved shared the view that it should be built upon as a basis for a rank and file movement against the sell-out of living standards represented by National Wage Agreements (NWA's).

When the CP pulled its members and followers out of the DSSC (without internal debate, we learn later from the IMS breakaway group) it was in

of the "Communist" Party and the petty-bourgeois "Workers' Party" of Sinn Fein. In a nutshell, day-to-day tactics must always be subordinated to a programmatic strategy for workers' power!

Further articles in CLASS STRUGGLE will examine in depth the problems of trade union bureaucracy, reformism in the labour movement and the task of building a rank and file movement. The present article is a critical evaluation of recent experiences and squandered opportunities.

Our attacks on the opportunism and confusion of other socialist groups have only one purpose: to expose what we believe are the roots of the total irrelevance of the "revolutionary" left as a political force. We expect replies from them. Only through debate can an effective programme be worked out which can be the basis of regroupment on the left.

reality recoiling from its first close-up exposure to rival trotskyist groups. It claimed that, as a single-issue campaign, it should not perpetuate itself. But, when one wage agreement followed another the CP maintained a sectarian boycott of the DSSC even though the DSSC continued till 1976 as the only organised inter-union campaign.

What bothered the CP was that their recruitment opportunism was restricted by working with other groups and they would rather not mobilise workers at all if it meant that smaller groups might have a chance to argue for their views. "We pulled our members out because it was taken over by bloody trotskyites" - thus spoke a leading member of the CP two years later. Sinn Fein, for its part, followed the CP line.

Unfortunately, too many of the "trotskyites" came to take the same view when, not having gained much in three years, they came to believe that it was politics itself that

kept the DSSC from growing, rather than wrong politics, opportunist politics and political confusion.

SMALL GAINS

The DSSC continued through 1974 with a much reduced campaign against new NWA terms. It had, however, developed a small-circulation paper of its own, a wide network of contacts and even a feeble national committee linking it with a few tiny initiatives in the provinces aimed at setting up local rank-and-file committees. A programme of rank and file demands had been agreed, representing a considerable gain. Agreement went deeper, however, and was more detailed than the list of its demands included here from issue no. 5 of the Trade Unionist. For example, it issued leaflets on equal pay which included the demand for availability of contraceptives and women's right to control their own fertility.

" DEMANDS OF THE DSSC

- "A return to free collective bargaining.
- " Automatic wage increases to compensate for increases in the cost of living, based on a cost of living index drawn up by the Trade Union movement.
- "Full equality for women workers.
- "Opposition to redundancies - five days work or five days pay.
- "End the two-tier picketing system.
- "Withdrawal of the ICTU from the Employer-Labour Conference.
- "For greater democracy in the unions.
- "For joint inter-union rank and file committees at work and throughout industry.
- "No restrictions on the right to strike.
- "Opposition to productivity deals which result in a loss of jobs.
- "Support for trade unionists in dispute."

While the DSSC quickly won the enmity of trade union leaders (and the left groups suffered a loss of nerve in this respect), the DSSC also

became a focus for several groups of workers in dispute. It involved itself in larger disputes through solidarity action and propaganda, on some occasions with the approval of officials of smaller unions. There was scope for increased work of this kind, but attendances in 1975 fell off, and by 1976 when solidarity work was resumed, the DSSC's days were numbered. Its final abolition after the 1976 "Campaign Against Wage Restraint" can only be explained in terms of the politics of SWM and MSR, the only two of the original groups remaining in it. But more of that below.

1976 CAMPAIGN

The revival at the end of 1975 ran into a severe internal crisis in the new year in which SWM led a walk-out of ten of the thirty in attendance. This was an attempt to restrict membership and retrieve a "representative" appearance, resulting in a new set of rules which were just as quickly thrown aside.

SWM, MSR and followers steered the DSSC into liquidation in the wage-restraint campaign, a single-issue campaign against proposed terms for the 1976 NWA. They rejected the idea that the DSSC should continue to have its own meetings or that, alternatively, the campaign should be broadened to take up the programme of the DSSC.

This sharp turn meant abandoning solidarity work, publications and meetings of the DSSC as such. It enabled the two left groups to shelve the debate on how to fight the related aspects of the crisis and agitate for a rank and file movement through the network of DSSC contacts.

Some took the view, correctly, that the CP's followers ought to be involved in the campaign, but they opportunistically used this as an argument for raising only the single slogan of opposition to the NWA - as if that would make the least difference to the CP.

LAUNCHING PLATFORM

In March 1976 a small DSSC meeting almost exclusively of socialists, accepted a programme of demands against the NWA, for full compensation for inflation, against redundancies and unemployment and for equal pay. This was to be submitted to a conference which took place with 90 militants on 27 March. The resulting resolution adopted is appended to this article.

It emerged, however, that the SWM and MSR rejected this programme as the basis of the proposed campaign. But they did not say so before the campaign launching conference, nor did they, as effective joint organisers with a few individuals, bother to sit down and discuss how best to steer the conference. As a result, the remarkable attendance of 90 militants was wasted in the formal passage of a resolution that was tacitly rejected by a significant section of the organisers who were, as part of the DSSC, proposing it.

Arguments against this programme were put from the floor as motions but by then it was too late to hammer out a perspective that would turn the enthusiasm of the meeting into material gains. Furthermore, SWM and MSR subsequently claimed that the resolution adopted at the conference had no status and rejected any attempt to publicise the demands which posed an alternative to the Wage Agreement. The simple rejection of the NWA was all they would allow to be published along with cheer-leading the sectional wage claims of the craft unions.

The support of the SWM and MSR for the resulting Campaign Against Wage Restraint, as groups, was pathetic, despite the dedication of a few of their members. On unemployment both groups rejected the proposal to issue a leaflet from the Campaign to the Dublin Trades Council demonstration against unemployment. Instead both groups produced their own sheets to add to the six others on offer.

MSR rejected the call for "free collective bargaining (in common with the B&ICO!) and believed that

equal pay should not be raised in the fight against the Wage Agreement.

SWM propaganda advocated once-off lump-sum claims in imitation of the craft unions behind whom they trailed. The building workers' claim from that period, though conceded in part only, has yet to be paid and has had no effect in preventing the acceptance of two subsequent wage agreements.

IF NO WAGE AGREEMENT THEN WHAT?

In July 1976 when the first set of NWA proposals had been defeated despite the generally undemocratic nature of union ballots, no alternative had been proposed from any quarter. The result was that without even the semblance of a mandate from the union movement the Congress negotiators (including the CP leader of ASTMS which was opposed to NWAs) went back to the Employer-Labour Conference and re-negotiated an interim agreement and subsequently a longer-term wage agreement which added up to worse than the rejected terms, especially for women and the lower-paid.

Using the names of individual militants, mostly their own members or supporters, the SWM succeeded in convening a final meeting of the Campaign committee without using the name of the Campaign. It was held on July 19 and consisted of about 20 of those active in the Campaign Against Wage Restraint. This ad-hoc meeting presumed to abolish the DSSC which had not met under that name since March. It was not, however, a notified meeting of those who were members of the DSSC under the new rules so bitterly fought for by these self-appointed convenors.

SWM - MSR - BCCUS COMMITTEE

The July meeting elected a committee of five who were not to be subject to any regular general meetings. This committee undertook to initiate action and leaflets against any further wage agreements. MSR and SWM and supporters comprised the committee, involving their leading members directly. And what did this committee do?

MSR, especially in the period after the withdrawal of the CP and Official Sinn Fein and the disappearance of the LWR.

In that period, having expelled those who later initiated the IWG, SWM's centrism emerged in full. Recruitment opportunism, the abandonment of its own formal political positions and an increasingly abstracted moralism in its paper, especially towards the trade union leaders, have been its hallmarks.

Formally, always committed to the building of a rank and file movement, SWM has never broken from the "rank-and-file-ism" of its mentors in the British IS group. Thus its understanding of the bureaucracy as corrupt and based on material privileges leads it to ignore the reformist politics of the bureaucracy and its real basis in the acceptance of the wage contract system as the limiting framework of trade union "bargaining". It is this accommodation to life under capitalism and the resulting "professionalising" of wage-bargaining that create the bureaucracy, its need to control the union members and its reformist politics. Ignoring the task of breaking workers from the grip of reformist ideas, SWM elevates mere militancy as the way forward and refuses to argue even for its own political perspectives. It actually believes that militancy is in itself a break with reformism. Rather than fight for a programme which will break workers from reformist leadership it rejects reformist political groups as irrelevant. The completion of this sectarianism is to see the building of a rank-and-file movement as simply a back-yard for recruitment, a department of the party itself.

While SWM has shifted its attention from the DSSC to the Trades Council and the building of a rank and file grouping in the ITGWU its political orientation has not changed at all. When abolishing the DSSC, SWM spokesmen held out the prospect of building a city-wide rank and file movement after groups had been set up within unions. They have, however, traded the class-wide political perspective of a rank and file movement for the creation of ginger groups

within the unions. SWM's sleep-walking from one crumbling hillock to another augurs poorly for the delivery of their promises.

IF IT LOOKS LEFT ; PUSH IT...

The MSR, in advocating the abolition of the DSSC last July made a similar pledge of a second coming. They, too, would retire into the unions to consolidate support therein the parlance of the USFI - "class struggle tendencies".

This particular perspective on the rank and file is a perfect companion to MSR's new-found conservatism in trade union matters evident in a weakening towards the bureaucracy and the refusal to call for free collective bargaining - in effect defending centralised bargaining despite its deeply bureaucratic and undemocratic nature in the present period. Not the least among their blunders, nor indeed does it appear to be a mere passing fad, is their adaptation to the bureaucracy's call for a 'national economic plan'.

On the wrong assumption that workers were calling for an economic plan they adopted the form of the demand and propagandised to give it a 'socialist' content. This they have been doing without in any way connecting the slogan to the political perspective of a workers' government. We quote:

MSR leaflet, May '76: "The trade unions must ... formulate an Economic Plan which bases itself on social needs, in order to get the economy going".

And Feb. 1977: "The only way in which unemployment can be eliminated is through a national economic plan based on the use of our natural resources, nationalisation of key industries and the parasitic financial sector, legislation giving workers control over production, protection for women..."

--MSR trade union newsheet no.6.

Such a plan might at a certain juncture be posed as part of a united front programme for a Workers' Government (though hardly "to get the economy going!"), but

only as the capstone to a whole programme of transitional demands actively fought for in the rank and file movement. As posed by MSR it is not a fighting programme. Instead it bolsters illusions in reformism when even reformists are publicly in despair; it consigns political answers to the realm of abstraction and leaves the class unarmed.

It is only in this perspective on MSR that one can locate or make sense of their attitude to the rank and file. Because they lack the perspective of a transitional programme for now capable of linking the day-to-day fights for reforms and for workers' control to the transitional goal of a Workers Government, MSR must fall into consolidating every leftist stir that has the appearance of class struggle. In common with opportunists in general, political clarity is the first victim of their desire to have about them a broad current that is flowing vaguely in the right direction, a current that they will locate by hook or by crook no matter how far under they have to sink. Even in this period of capitalist crisis revolutionaries must swim against the prevailing tide in the class which is towards confusion division and defeat, despite heroic sectional militancy.

A QUESTION OF PROGRAMME

The basis of a rank and file movement cannot simply be the unity of workers on the basis of simply coordinating their frustrations in the workers' own terms. A clear programme must be fought for in any section of the rank and file where socialists are active. At least a substantial part of such a programme must be an absolute pre-condition of any rank-and file organisation started by socialists.

Where the focus is unemployment socialists have no role as socialists if they do not agitate for clear demands on overtime, public works, nationalisations, etc.; where redundancy is the issue socialists must fight for unconditional physical resistance around clear demands - work or full pay, open the books, nationalisation under workers' control. When wages are

the issue, a clear and unifying demand must be raised which deals with inflation. In general, socialists must bring their programme of clear, class-wide, concrete demands into every struggle and seek to build structures that will give permanent form to advances by workers.

When building a political current in the unions it is not enough to try to connect up everyone who makes left noises. Activity must be focussed around precise demands for union democracy, for organisation independently of the union officials as the only way to defend, let alone advance the unions. Every union platform must be used, but "unofficial" meetings and bulletins are indispensable tools. We cannot ever accept confinement to the official structures, nor should we tolerate the delusion that 'rejuvenating' union branches is enough.

"WE CAN'T APPROACH WORKERS FROM THE OUTSIDE..."

- This wretched token of trade union conservatism and cowardice is also a rejection of socialism - which does not grow on assembly lines. The idea was used as an argument against the continuation of the DSSC. Specifically, it was raised to discourage the DSSC from taking any action about the mass redundancies in Gouldings. Probably because they felt more at home in the Dublin Trades Council, some erstwhile pillars of the DSSC claimed we could not go along from the outside to workers such as in Gouldings. So when these were sold out by the unions, there was no-one to offer a class perspective of solidarity, no-one to draw the lessons of the need for a rank and file movement which refuses to recognise the factory fence and the petty boundaries of union officials. When a handful of men stayed inside for the best part of a year and repeatedly found themselves in court, who was there in the Trades Council to fight alongside them?

EVERY INITIATIVE

The building of a rank and file movement must be seen as a class-wide task involving every initiative

including local committees, cutting across factories, including every agitational grouping of the labour movement - price watch committees of housewives, womens rights groups, anti-repression committees, alliances

FIGHTING THE CRISIS

The unity of the working class in the teeth of the present capitalist offensive was central to our arguments in the DSSC for an agitational alternative to Wage Agreements. As an answer to inflation we advanced the demand for inflation-proof wages, i.e. automatic increases to be won by rank and file action. We rejected percentage increases in favour of a common minimum lump sum for all, to compensate in full for price rises, with no restriction on the right to fight for more where any section of the class can wrest it. The actual form of the demand suggested was 'at least £1 for every 1% rise in the official Price Index'. This sum is necessary to compensate for growing deductions, the bias in the price index and the need to raise the earnings of the lower paid. As an actual amount of money it is entirely up to the rank and file to decide it in struggle, but the unifying nature of the demand makes it necessary for those suggesting it to put forward a considered figure to give the demand a concrete form.

It is true that this demand could become a bargaining counter between bureaucrats and employers until it emerged beaten down to a number of pence for each percent or to a larger amount for each rise over a sizeable threshold. This fate can be suffered by many necessary demands when lifted out of their context as part of a programme. But it was precisely our point of view that called for a rank-and-file programme of linked demands to be taken up. It was our perspective alone that argued that every campaign should be conducted with the aim of building a movement to resist the crisis in all its aspects.

By rejecting this view, MSR and SWM turned the Campaign Against Wage Restraint into a single-issue flash-in-the-pan. Indeed, by refusing to

pose any alternative to the Agreement in terms of a rank and file movement, the Campaign played into the hands of left bureaucrats whose image benefited by joining in opposition to NWA's but who were relieved at not having to face the prospect of rank and file militancy.

"INEVITABLE PROCESS"?

MSR's justification for a single-issue campaign ties in with their implied belief that there is, beneath all, an inevitable revolutionary process, and that every progressive movement by workers represents a permanent gain even if it leaves no obvious trace. We do not share that pious hope. With it comes the policy of simply consolidating every movement on its own 'spontaneous' terms.

They wrote, with regard to workers fighting specific or local attacks: "by organising on this single issue the reformist illusions that workers have will begin to dissolve". No militant seriously expects, however, that this can be said with regard to the class on the question of a single-issue campaign against wage restraint in the context where there is not even a minority rank and file movement.

Merely declaiming wage restraint implies seeing workers as devoid of ideas about the crisis in general, and as immune to the propaganda and divisive tactics of the capitalists and their fire-brigade men in the unions. In speaking to the class or a cross-section of it, we cannot be effective by publicly ignoring the connections between the different aspects of the crisis.

Workers voted for the NWA because they believed that their wage "rises" had caused inflation, believed that the strong could only gain at the expense of the weak and believed that larger wage rises

PORTUGAL — WHAT ARE THE LESSONS?

"A revolutionary situation exists in Portugal, a situation of fragmentation of power - leading to powerlessness. It cannot continue for long. Either the crisis will be resolved by the working class or by the forces of reaction. Such situations are the supreme test of parties, programmes, policies. In the last resort, all the political tendencies in the working class movement are to be judged by their willingness and their ability to lead the working class forward to power in the time of crisis - or by their contribution to its defeat. Portugal is the touchstone for organisations claiming to be socialist or communist" - the words of I.S. leader T.Cliff, Sep. 1975, I.S. Special no. 81/82.

A silence has fallen over the revolutionary left in Ireland and Britain on the question of Portugal. Journals and papers like the British IS's (now SWP) or SWM's, once loud with the doings of Portuguese workers, have little or nothing to say. Apparently the lessons for these centrists are only the lessons of success.

While in opposition if the SWM we argued that such an attitude betrays contempt for Irish workers and Portuguese workers. Critical analysis of the failures of programmes, strategy and tactics is an elementary and essential aspect of internationalism. In its absence practical assistance and solidarity is likely to be missing too.

This article does not intend to analyse the whole course of events in Portugal up until the present situation. That would require a much longer piece. Here we are concerned to highlight the importance of those crucial questions of programme, strategy and tactics that are at the heart of the method of revolutionary Marxists as opposed to the opportunism and sectarianism of centrist and reformist parties. We believe that clarification and debate on such questions is now central to a perspective of regroupment and fusion if the Irish Marxist left is to

avoid further stagnation and irrelevance.

Up to 18 months ago Portugal seemed poised on the brink of socialist revolution. Discipline in the army had broken down to such an extent that it was no longer reliable as a weapon in the hands of the ruling class. Struggles for workers' control in the media had created a workers' daily paper, Republica, and similarly, at Radio Renascenca the workers had wrested control from the Church. Striking building workers trapped the Constituent Assembly in the Sao Benti palace until their demands were met, almost driving the seat of bourgeois rule out of Lisbon to the conservative north.

The events of November 25th 1975 and the retreat of the working class since then completely reversed this situation and shifted the balance of forces firmly in favour of the right wing. Such a fundamental change could not have resulted merely from a clever manoeuvre by the right in the armed forces, particularly at a time when they were so weak. Though the right undoubtedly were planning such manoeuvres, this does not in itself explain the magnitude of the defeat in November 1975.

The fundamental reasons lie in the crisis of leadership of the working class movement. By November 25th the class struggle had reached such a peak that there were only two alternatives - either the seizure of power or backwards into a period of defeat. We now know the outcome.

We believe that all is not lost in Portugal. The class still faces enormous battles in the coming period. The war is not yet over. In order that its heroic struggles shall not go down in total defeat we raise here the crucial questions on which hang the fate of the Portuguese revolution in our view.

UNITED FRONT

The hold of the reformist parties (CP and Socialist Party) within the working class has strengthened in spite of the defeats. This was entirely predictable. Their power to confuse, obstruct and ultimately to destroy the independent mobilisation of the class for crucial defensive and offensive action has always necessitated the fight by revolutionary socialists for a workers' United Front against reaction.

Early in the struggle, the revolutionary left in Portugal formed the FUR (Revolutionary United Front). It was totally inadequate for its purpose. It did not, initially, include the CP, the largest and most influential party in the working class. It excluded altogether the SP. Furthermore, whereas a united front requires limited but precise slogans that attempt to win workers, soldiers and peasants organisations to them while permitting the clearest distinction between political tendencies within the front, the FUR 'programme' was long-winded and imprecise as a programme of a revolutionary movement. Even more importantly, the most essential and principled aspect of revolutionary strategy - complete and total independence from all bourgeois institutions as solutions to working class problems - was violated. The FUR accepted the programme of the MFA, the army of the bourgeois state.

The United Front from below must involve all workers' parties influential in the working class. The exclusion of the CP and SP only strengthened the view among many workers that politics is essentially sectarian self-seeking.

The content of the U.F. programme is the real key to the tasks facing revolutionary marxists. Only if the demands and slogans reflect the feelings and most urgent needs of the class as a whole can the divisions sown by reformists and the confusion peddled by centrists be overcome in struggle. It was precisely the failure of the FUR to hammer out a clear programme of

political answers to the most immediate economic, social and political questions of the day that contributed to advanced workers and soldiers falling for the lunatic propaganda of the centrist PRP/BR about 'insurrection now'.

PROGRAMME

The basic elements of a proletarian United Front programme should extend to the following.

1. Workers' control of production-nationalisation without compensation of all remaining enterprises above a certain size; workers' inspection and veto of all management decisions.

2. Support of all workers and peasants in struggle over low wages and working conditions. A rising scale of wages tied to a workers' cost of living index, and work or full pay.

3. Democratisation of trade unions; all officials to be subject to imperative mandates and instant recall, and to be paid the average wage of their members.

4. Immediate economic measures to solve the disruption of production by the Portuguese and international bourgeoisie:

a. concentration of the banks into a central state bank under workers' control; and state control of foreign banks.

b. nationalisation without compensation of all foreign holdings.

c. nationalisation of all large land holdings and control of the land to those who till it.

d. modernisation of agriculture and mechanisation credit for small-holders.

e. a scheme of economic reconstruction under the control of workers' committees with compulsory labour service for all those fit.

5. Armed militias of workers, soldiers and peasants. Withdrawal from NATO and unconditional independence from all political and military alliances with Stalinist or bourgeois states.

6. Solidarity with workers in other countries; for international rank and file trade union links.
7. Support for Spanish workers in struggle. For a United Iberian Socialist States.
8. For a revolutionary international of workers' parties on a revolutionary programme for the world crisis of capitalism.

UNITED FRONT FROM ABOVE

On the basis of the above programme revolutionaries fight for a government of the workers - a Workers' Government. They do so in order to a. deal with the deep economic collapse of Portuguese capitalism and combat economic sabotage; and b. expose the social democratic (SP) and stalinist (CP) leaders' real positions on these questions to their supporters in the working class.

The tactic of the Workers' Government is to prepare and arm the class for taking state power in a situation where the masses are still under the leadership of reformist and centrist parties. The situation where a workers' government of revolutionaries, stalinists and social democrats was elected to govern through a constituent assembly on the basis of the above programme would provoke immediate and violent reaction by the domestic and international bourgeoisie. In that event only the most proletarian and democratic of institutions, the workers' councils, could be the basis of mobilising effectively the mass of workers and soldiers for the only complete resistance - the smashing of state power and the establishment of a workers' state.

WORKERS COUNCILS

The perspective entailed in building the United Front is the creation of workers' councils. The Portuguese working class has shown immense creativity in the variety of fighting organisations it has built. Despite constant attempts by the whole spectrum of stalinism, from the PCP to the Maoist MLP, to bureaucratise them or subject them

to their sectarian stranglehold they succeeded in setting up genuine organs of worker democracy - neighbourhood and worker committees of struggle.

The urgent task should have been to draw delegates from these bodies into local councils and ultimately into a national assembly. To develop workers' councils all sectarianism must be laid aside. All bona fide delegates from workplaces should be admitted. Any attempt to limit their members to 'revolutionary' workers or to exclude certain parties or to proclaim the councils to be above, outside or anti-party should be fought. To enable the members of such councils to assess the right leadership, the most correct strategy, there must be absolute freedom of expression and caucus for all parties. Under correct leadership the councils would be a powerful lever for achieving workers' power.

THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

Events in Portugal in the last year have proved at least one thing - that the programmes, strategies and tactics of the 'revolutionary' left have proved totally useless as a guide to action for the masses. Whether accomodating to the SP (as did the Partido Revolucionario Trabalhadores, PRT), or to the Armed Forces Movement (as with Liga Comunista Internacionale) or flirting with charismatic bourgeois figures like army commander Carvalho (as did the Partido Revolucionario do Proletariado, PRP/BR), the trotskyist left stand indicted above all in their failure to even attempt to win. All remained impotent before the gains of the Maoist UDP which is a sectarian stalinist grouping firmly wedded to 'stagism'.

Only a movement with a clearly tested transitional programme can now take up the destiny of the Portuguese revolution. In order to develop this programme it would have to fight in the class:

- a. to build, develop and centralise workers' organisations into effective centres of struggle and potential organs of power;

- b. to launch the fight for the united front, with every workers' party where possible. Within the U.F. and workers' councils revolutionaries would fight for the principal planks of their overall strategy:
1. a workers' answer to the capitalist crisis;
 2. the dissolution of the armed forces as part of the machine of the bourgeois state, to win soldiers to the side of the working class;
 3. support and assistance to Spanish workers and African freedom fighters;
 6. the building of a revolutionary international on a Leninist basis.

INTERNATIONALISM

The Portuguese revolution, itself owing an enormous debt to the heroic national liberation struggles against the Portuguese colonial occupation forces, exerts a profound influence on developments in Europe and beyond. For revolutionaries in the rest of Europe Portugal is a vital issue. Already direct links between workers have been built. However, as we have earlier stated, the failure to seriously approach the question of analysis, ignoring the practical consequences of such an approach, has left many workers with the cynical view that revolutions never work. Such a view leads to demoralisation and to deepening false consciousness.

In Ireland, it was fundamental to argue for an independent analysis of Portugal before as large a section as possible of workers. The basis of this would include:

- a. universal lessons - the role of imperialism and the native bourgeoisie in economic sabotage; the role of the USA and EEC, of the army and the state machine; the treachery of Social Democracy and stalinism; the dangers of centrism, e.g. the PRP/BR, and the vital need for a correct revolutionary strategy.
- b. debate with the left before as many workers as possible - serious discussion of political

differences, including with Labour Party and CP followers.

- g. insistence in every publication on the supreme importance of concrete strategy and tactics to counteract the belief that spontaneity is enough.

- Only a clear and scientific understanding of the successes and failures of the Portuguese class struggle is worth imparting to Irish workers. There can be no tolerating cheerleading the appearances of revolutionary surges and then irresponsibly pretending, when ground is lost, that nothing ever happened, that no review is necessary.

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MILITANT'S CHAUVINISM

On Feb 18, Ted Grant, guiding glimmer of the Militant Group, arrived in Derry from Britain as part of his tour of Ireland to warn socialists and anyone interested of the attack on Militant by the bourgeois press and the Labour right wing. Armed with the usual mass of statistics and supported by a coterie of local Militants, the maestro of blackboard socialism hectoring and hammered us with the time-worn mechanistic notions of the Militant road to the 'socialist transformation of society'. There were no surprises and the great swell of 'revolutionary' politics left us barely ankle deep in a tepid pool of stagnant reformism.

SIGNIFICANT BLUNDER

Devoid of any revolutionary marxist perspective on reformism or on the capitalist state, Militant is fated to the kind of politics which led to the disastrous chauvinism exhibited by Grant at the Derry meeting.

In reply to an indignant harangue by an IRSP comrade on Militant's refusal to support anti-imperialist movements in Ireland, Grant blurted out that the Provisionals were to blame for all the sectarian and economic ills of the North. No theory of imperialist exploitation and repression here! And even more unforgivably for a socialist he stammered: "WHAT ARE OUR BOYS SUPPOSED TO DO WHEN THEY'RE BEING SHOT IN THE BACK". -This in reference to the Bloody Sunday massacre of innocent civilians by the armed thugs of British Imperialism!!

However untempered by disciplined political thinking may have been the attack by the IRSP comrade, Grant's flustered reply was unmistakably clear. The politics of Militant left him a paralysed victim of the ugly ghoul of national chauvinism, horribly reminiscent of the events leading to the decline of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals when working class leaders shamefully succumbed to crass 'patriotism' and class collaboration.

As one Militant supporter at the Derry fiasco observed: "That blunder by Grant has effectively finished the Militant Group in Derry". Not quite true. One wonders what effective role they ever played in Derry.

BEVAN WITCH-HUNT

According to Grant, the attack on Militant in Britain was to serve as a warning to the left who in a time of deepening capitalist crises were being attacked and slandered by vicious press campaigns and rumblings from the right of Labour. It was, Grant assured us, because Militant stood firmly on its principles and offered constructive answers to workers faced with savage attacks that it was the centre of a concerted attack by bourgeois reaction. When asked by a local member of the IWG how the behaviour of Bevan in dropping all his politics and eschewing any connection with the Militant faction (- which as far as he was aware 'doesn't exist as a group') in accepting a bureaucratic position as Youth Officer in the L.P., how this was an example of clear-cut principled leadership for the class "comrade" Grant could only mumble that Mr. Bevan was correct to have acted so - "after all the Tribune Group accept the same limitation". So Militant model themselves on that clique of left reformists?

WE DEFEND MILITANT BUT...

We will at all times defend this group and any other socialists from attacks by the capitalist press or right-wing reaction. However, we shall not spare them when we criticise their peddling of illusions in trade union bureaucracy, as in the Better Life For All campaign or during the Loyalist "strike". Especially we shall not cease to attack them for refusing to support the anti-imperialist movement of republican and socialist groups.

We unreservedly condemn any leader in any labour movement who raises the disgusting spectre of national chauvinism in defence of the political bankruptcy of a group which has nothing but ridiculous illusions to offer North or South to the working class.

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